CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

Vieux Carré Commission

Guidelines for Balconies, Galleries & Porches

BALCONIES, GALLERIES & PORCHES

The architectural character of the French Quarter is enriched by how buildings engage the sidewalk and welcome visitors. While a Creole cottage often has a simple stoop and perhaps a roof overhang, a townhouse may include an elaborate metal balcony or gallery.

Balconies, galleries, porches and roof overhangs are prominent building features throughout the Vieux Carré. They are key elements in determining a building's style and play a significant role in its appearance and that of the streetscape. These appendages often create an outside room where a property owner may find a sheltered transition into their building, an exterior living space to enjoy a cool breeze and a place to meet and converse with neighbors or welcome visitors. The overhang also protects windows and doors below from direct sun and rain, allowing them to remain open during a rain shower, and provide protection from the elements for a passerby.

SECTION INDEX

The Vieux Carré Commission (VCC) reviews every alteration or a replacement of a balcony, gallery, veranda, porch, stoop or roof overhang. This section includes:

- Types of Balconies, Galleries & Porches – 08-2
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- Porch Component Checklist & Materials – 08-4
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All applicants must obtain a Vieux Carré Commission (VCC) permit as well as all other necessary City permits prior to proceeding with any work. Reviewing and becoming familiar with these *Guidelines* during the early stages of a project can assist in moving a project quickly through the permit approval process, saving an applicant both time and money. Staff review of all details is required to ensure proposed work is appropriate to a specific property.

Guidelines addressing additional historic property topics are available at the VCC office and on its website at www.nola.gov/vcc. For more information, to clarify whether a proposed project requires VCC review, or to obtain a property rating of significance or a permit application, contact the VCC at (504) 658-1420.

The first step in using these *Guidelines* is to understand a property's color rating. The rating corresponds to the historical and/or architectural significance and then determines what type of change will be permitted and the review process required for each property under the jurisdiction of the VCC.

Review boxes provided throughout the *Guidelines* indicate the lowest level of review required for the specified work. Staff can forward any application to the Architectural Committee (AC) and/or the Commission for further consideration.

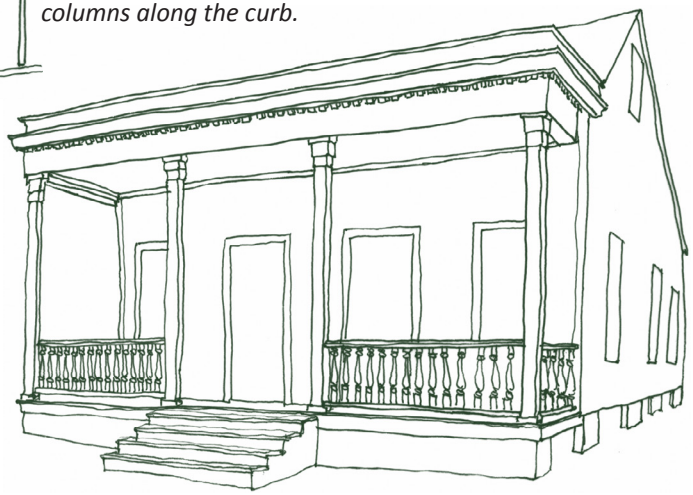
TYPES OF BALCONIES, GALLERIES & PORCHES

Roof Overhang

A roof overhang is a cantilevered extension of a roof. Some pre-1840 overhangs, known as an abat-vent, are supported by metal outriggers. (Refer to Abat-Vent, Guidelines for Roofing, page 04-5). Later overhangs are extensions of roof rafters, typically including a boxed soffit. Victorian period overhangs are more decorative and can include brackets, panels and decorative trim.

Gallery

Where a building is constructed at the front property lot line, a gallery (the local term for a veranda) may extend over the full width of the sidewalk, supported by posts or columns along the curb.



Porch

A porch is an exterior space attached to a building at the 1st floor level, typically the full width of the front and/or rear façade. Usually it includes a roof and has a framed wood floor supported on masonry piers or a foundation.

Balcony

A balcony projects from the face of a building 3- to 4-feet, and is generally supported by wrought iron bracket at the front elevation of a pre-1880 masonry building and by wood at the secondary elevation and service building, as well as on a post-1880s building. A basket or box balcony is narrower than the building, generally one or two bays in width.

Double Gallery

A double gallery house is two-stories with a gallery across the front façade at both levels, supported by columns or posts. In most cases, the upper gallery is protected by an extension of the main building's roof.

SECONDARY FACADE BALCONIES, GALLERIES & PORCHES

Service Wing Balcony

A balcony can act as an outdoor corridor, particularly in a townhouse, connecting the rooms of the main house to the smaller service wing rooms. A service wing balcony typically has a wood structure and a simple wood balustrade.

Side Gallery

A side gallery is a narrow covered side porch that acts as an exterior corridor and secondary entrance.

STOOPS & STEPS

Steps that lead directly to an entrance without a landing or porch are known as a stoop. A stoop can be wood, stone, brick or concrete, with wood being prevalent for wood houses. Openings are recommended at the base of a stoop and/or steps, particularly wood, to allow for storm water drainage and ventilation. (Refer to examples below.)

RETAINING HISTORIC STOOPS & STEPS

Where a double residential building is converted to a single family home or when the main entrance is located on the side elevation, the VCC requires that the stoop or stairs be retained at each historic door entrance even if no longer in use.

PORCH COMPONENT CHECKLIST & MATERIALS

Roof – Generally same material as main roof; can be metal if low pitched – Verify roofing is secure, flashing is intact and there is no standing water

Gutter and downspout – Typically metal – Verify all are secure; clear of leaves and other debris

Molding – Typically wood – Verify paint surface is intact, especially behind and below a gutter

Lintel – Typically wood – Verify paint surface is intact, especially behind and below a gutter

Brackets – Typically ornate wood – Verify paint surface is intact

Frieze – Typically ornate wood – Verify paint surface is intact

Soffit vent – Typically ornate cast iron – Verify paint surface is intact and holes are open

Porch ceiling – Typically tongue and groove wood – Check for peeling paint that could indicate dampness and a possible roofing or flashing problem

Post (column if round) – Typically wood – Check base for rot, proper attachment and paint surface is intact

Balustrade – Typically wood top rail, bottom rail, and balusters – Verify elements are secure and that paint surface is intact

Apron – Typically wood – Check substructure for water or insect damage and paint surface is intact

Porch floor – Typically tongue and groove wood – Verify floor is sloped to drain water away from the building and paint surface is intact

Porch steps – Wood, concrete, stone or brick – Check wood for rot, termite damage and intact paint surface

MAINTENANCE OF BALCONIES, GALLERIES, PORCHES & OVERHANGS

Due to the important role that balconies, galleries, porches and roof overhangs play in the perception of a historic building and streetscape, original materials and details should be preserved. Because they shield walls below from the elements, areas covered by a balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang, such as a window, door and wall surface, tend to require less maintenance. However, because a horizontal surface such as a step, railing and/or roof are exposed to the weather they might require additional maintenance. **One of the best ways to preserve wood features is regular painting.** If a component is deteriorating, repair or replacement in a historically appropriate manner is recommended.

As a porch tends to be constructed over a crawl space and might have wood elements that are in contact with the ground, it is highly susceptible to termite damage. (Refer to *Termites, Guidelines for Exterior Woodwork*, page 05-8.)

Similar to wood elements, ornamental metals also require regular maintenance. **Both wrought iron and cast iron are highly prone to rusting.** When an iron element rusts, there are two significant issues. The first relates to its dimensions, primarily thickness, which can increase approximately ten times its original size. When embedded in a building material, rust expansion results in cracking of adjacent building materials. The second issue relates to the loss of structural integrity of the rusted metal component itself. One of the best ways to protect an ornamental metal is to regularly remove surface rust and repaint using a rust inhibitive paint. (Refer to *Ornamental Metals,* page 08-8 for additional information.)

For additional maintenance information regarding a specific component of a balcony, gallery, porch or overhang, such as roofing, refer to the applicable *Guidelines* section.

COMPONENTS OF A BALCONY, GALLERY, PORCH OR OVERHANG

Every balcony, gallery, porch and roof overhang is made up of a number of components. These components all work together to achieve an integrated and unified visual, architectural and structural purpose characteristic of a building's type and style. It is important to note that not every porch, gallery, balcony or overhang includes every component.

Roofing: A roof is present on a porch or overhang, and may or may not be included at a balcony or gallery. A roof shelters the area below from sun and rain, and protects windows and doors below from the elements. A roof's material is generally dependent on its slope. At a more steeply pitched roof, as is found at a shotgun residence, the roof material would likely be a continuation of the main roof material, such as slate. At a gallery where the roof is relatively flat, or low-sloped, metal may be a more appropriate option. (Refer to *Guidelines for Roofing* for more information.)

Lintels: The lintel is the horizontal element between piers or columns and provides structural and visual support for the roof or wall surface above.

Wood Ornament: Decorative wood elements, such as a frieze, fretwork and bracket provide visual interest and are specific to a building's style and period of construction.

Brackets: This supporting element under a balcony or roof overhang projects from a building's wall surface and can be decorative. Typically, brackets extend to the outside edge of the balcony or overhang and can be wood or metal.

Ceiling: A porch ceiling is most often made of tongue and groove boards, but can be highly decorative and include panelling and other embellishments. In contrast, at the underside of a balcony or gallery, the structure and the bottom of the flooring of the level above is often visible.

Soffit Vents: Cast iron vents are often found in the ceiling of a porch, soffit or roof overhang. The vent allows air circulation into the framing, reducing heat and moisture. The opening should be kept clear of paint build-up and debris.

Flooring: The traditional material for flooring is tongue and groove boards. Regular repainting is needed to protect the wood flooring from rot and deterioration. An elaborate home may have marble or other stone flooring. Recently, a few property owners have replaced their tongue and groove flooring with concrete, which is not appropriate.

Privacy Screens: A privacy screen, which visually separates a shared balcony, gallery or porch at adjoining residences, such as a shotgun double, are typically wood, often with a curved top. A solid privacy screen is not appropriate at the end of a balcony, gallery or porch. A metal separator can provide a secure division between balconies and/or galleries at adjacent properties. (Refer to photograph, page 08-9.)

Steps: Steps may be made of a variety of materials including wood, brick, stone and/or concrete. In most instances, wood steps, sometimes flanked by plinths or with a railing to match the porch railing are most appropriate.

Chain walls and piers: A chain wall is a continuous supporting wall under the front edge of the porch, typically including vents. A pier is a rectangular support that sits directly under a porch or column. The chain wall and piers are most often brick, frequently with a protective stucco coating. A foundation vent allows air circulation, reducing crawl space moisture.

COLUMNS & POSTS

Posts and columns are vertical structural supporting members. Columns are round; posts are square or rectangular.

Classical, Fluted Corinthian Column

Greek Revival Post; Rectangular, Not Square

Arts and Crafts Tapered Post on Brick Pier

Chamfered (Beveled) Post with Brackets

Turned Gallery Post with Brackets

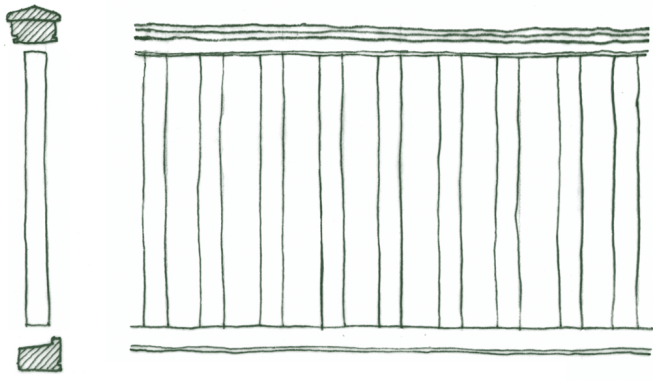
Metal Gallery Column

A Creole home, such as this townhouse, often has a simple balustrade and convex bulging posts.

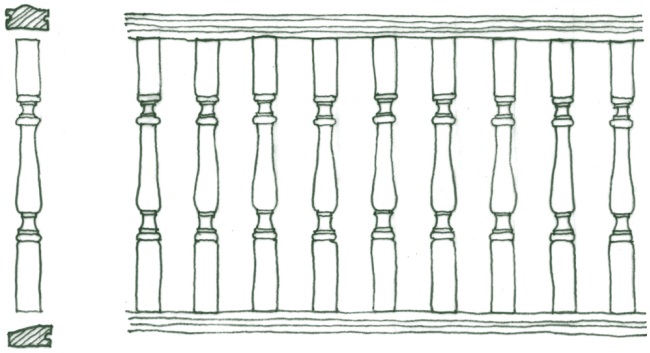
BALUSTRADES & RAILINGS

A balustrade is a railing with upper and lower horizontal members, known as rails, and vertical balusters of wood or metal. A replacement balustrade should match the overall style and character of the building.

A turned wood balustrade, produced by turning and carving square balusters on a lathe, are appropriate for most Italianate, Queen Anne, Eastlake, Classical Revival and Colonial Revival homes. Historic balusters tend to be wider than many new, mass-produced balusters.

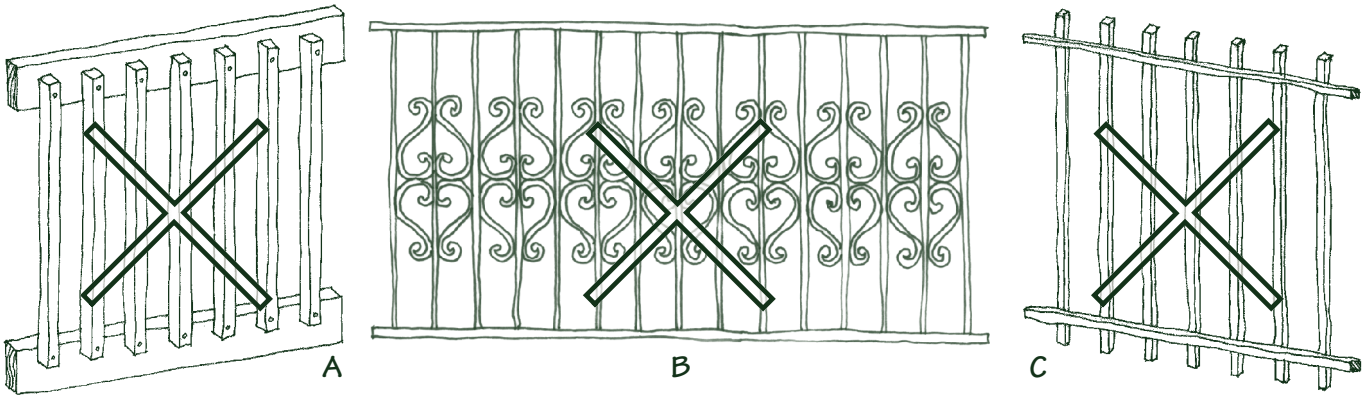


Square Post Balustrade



Victorian Turned Balustrade

A discrete, higher secondary safety rail has been installed behind the cast iron balustrade to meet building code requirements. An alternative would be to raise the historic balustrade to the required height.



The VCC does not approve requests for a wood "deck" balustrade (A), applied decorative scrolled metal ornament balustrade (B) or a balustrade composed of metal pickets welded to metal bars (C).

This gallery has delicate and ornate cast iron railings, posts, lintels and brackets that wrap the building's corner.

ORNAMENTAL METALS

In many ways, ornamental architectural metals are synonymous with the French Quarter. The ornate balconies and galleries lining the sidewalks create a unique streetscape and experience for locals and visitors alike. They provide shelter from the elements and are extensions of interior spaces, allowing inhabitants to share in the Quarter's street life.

Ornamental metals, including wrought iron and cast iron, are used for both structural and decorative purposes. Wrought iron is made by hand, heating, beating and stretching iron into decorative hardware and ironwork and was common through the mid-19th century. Cast iron, formed by casting iron in foundry molds, was popularized in the mid- to late-19th century. Casting allowed the fabrication of more elaborate and larger elements, such as columns, and produced standardized decorative components like scrollwork and filigree. Components could be ordered from a catalog and, for larger and more complex installations, individual pieces could be fastened together.

The use of wrought or cast iron details including handrails, cornice components, columns, brackets and balusters, is associated with specific architectural styles and periods. It was common for townhouses with a balcony to be retrofitted with a gallery and a building with a wood balcony or gallery to be retrofitted with ornamental cast iron at a later date. At buildings where modifications were made over time, the ornamental metal style may vary between floors.

Metal brackets, also known as consoles, are located under the balcony to provide structural support. Periodic review and repainting is recommended to ensure that metal elements are not rusting and the connection to the masonry wall remains secure.

The most essential maintenance requirement for wrought or cast iron is regular repainting with rust-inhibitive paint. The paint forms a film on the metal and prevents rusting. (Refer to *Specialty Paints, Guidelines for Exterior Painting*, page 09-04.) If a metal element is rusted, its structural integrity should be reviewed by a professional. If it is no longer able to support its own weight and/or that of its users, such as at a deteriorated balcony, its condition represents a safety hazard and it should be repaired or replaced. If it is determined that only the surface of the metal is rusted, proper preparation, the application of a metal primer and repainting are recommended.

Metal galleries tend to have thin metal columns with little ornament at the ground floor and be more decorative and ornate at upper floors. A ceiling fan can help keep a balcony or gallery cooler. The VCC only approves ceiling mounted fans that do not include an integral light. The City does not permit ceiling fans to be located directly over a sidewalk.

A cast iron decorative railing, sometimes found at a window, may include a repetitive pattern of detailed components.

A NEW BALCONY, GALLERY OR PORCH

Adding a new balcony, gallery, porch or overhang will greatly alter the appearance of a building. In select cases, the VCC might approve the installation of a new balcony, gallery, porch or overhang provided that:

- There is documentary evidence supporting a balcony, gallery, porch or overhang previously existed
- The installation is appropriate for the building type
- The installation does not destroy or conceal an important architectural feature or detail
- The proposed design is compatible in size, scale and design to the building and surrounding streetscape

When installing a new balcony, gallery, porch or overhang, great care should be taken to minimize the removal of existing building fabric during its installation and attachment. In addition, the design of the components should be simple and visually minimized to allow the wall surfaces beyond to remain visible. When installing a new metal gallery, simple posts located along the curb with a plain balustrade are generally most appropriate. (Refer to *Guidelines for New Construction, Additions & Demolition* for information regarding the reconstruction or installation of a new balcony, gallery, porch or overhang.)

A drop awning installed at either the front or side of a gallery or porch can help to keep it cooler. To be approved, a drop awning must roll-up, extend between bays and be consistent in color, material and details across a façade. To be considerate of neighbors, a drop awning should be rolled-up when not in use. Note the metal security divider between the adjoining galleries.

VCC REVIEW FOR ADDING OR REMOVING A BALCONY, GALLERY OR PORCH

The VCC does not allow the addition of ornamental wrought or cast iron to a gallery or balcony where it is not documented for the particular style or type of building, such as a former warehouse building. The VCC does not allow the removal of contributing ornamental metals or a porch.

It appears that these three buildings were constructed at the same time. They share several characteristics and architectural features. The center building does not include a balcony or gallery, although evidence at the wall surface suggests a gallery or balcony may have existed previously. With appropriate documentation, obtaining VVC approval for the reconstruction of the gallery or balcony might be possible.

STORM PREPAREDNESS

Similar to wood framed construction, the failure of a building appendage (balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang) during a storm can cause significant damage to the main building. Depending on how the appendage was constructed and attached, the potential damage can vary. Typically, damage is caused by the wind pulling the appendage away from the main building or dislodging its components that then become airborne debris. In cases where the roof of an appendage is an extension of the main roof, such as at a roof overhang, side gallery shotgun or loggia, high winds entering an opening or soffit vent might lift the main roof off of the building. (The potential damage may be reduced if soffit vents are covered in preparation for a storm.)

One of the best ways to protect an appendage from storm damage is to create a continuous load path from the top of the structure down to the ground. This includes improving connections between all structural elements, such as rafters, lintels, posts or columns, foundations, piers and the sidewalk.

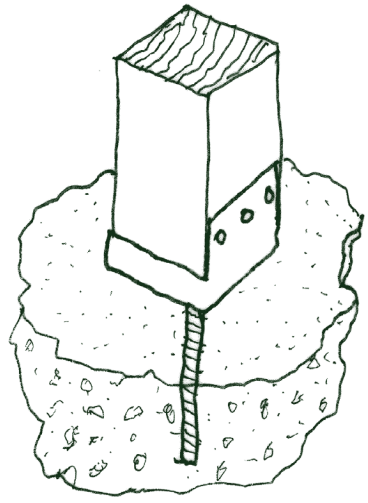
For a wood structure, the installation of hurricane connectors, including ties, straps and bolts, are recommended at all locations where the appendage meets the main building including the roof, ceiling and floor. (Refer to *Storm Preparedness, Guidelines for Exterior Woodwork*, page 05-10.) For a masonry building, proper maintenance typically involves repointing. (Refer to *Repointing Historic Masonry, Guidelines for Masonry & Stucco,* page 06-8.) **All connectors should be concealed from view and not encased in new, non-historic trim.**

Another hurricane protection option is fabric storm panels that can protect an open balcony, galley or porch from flying debris in the event of a storm. Fasteners can be pre-installed in locations that are minimally visible and painted to match adjacent surfaces. Fabric storm panels, commonly used in Florida, are lightweight, easy to install and allow light to enter a building when used during a storm event. A benefit is that they have little to no impact on the historic character of a building if installed only when a storm threatens. (Refer to *Storm Protection, Guidelines for Windows & Doors*, page 07-16.)

KEEP IN MIND…

- Balconies, galleries and porches are structural elements that require maintenance by property owners to permit their safe use and passage by pedestrians below – Consultation with an architect or engineer can identify safety issues that should be addressed
- Consultation with an architect or engineer is highly recommended prior to undertaking a hurricane connector project to allow the installation to be tailored to the specific requirements of the building
- All contractors are not familiar with the installation of hurricane protectors; Improper installation may be ineffective and potentially dangerous during a storm

A hurricane connector can be utilized at the attachment of posts to the structure of a gallery or a porch. They typically require longer fasteners, such as nails and screws, than traditional connectors. To minimize their visual appearance, the connector should be painted to match the color of the material to which it is attached and not in a contrasting color, as in this example.



Columns and posts can be anchored to the ground to reduce potential damage from a high wind. Some anchors raise the base of the post or column slightly above the ground or sidewalk, which can reduce damage from rising or moving storm water.

Several floor boards from this gallery are missing and loose. The remaining boards may fall onto pedestrians or become airborne in a high wind. Immediate repair is recommended.

A pipe bollard has been installed to protect the cast iron column from impact.

The base of this wood post is in constant contact with moisture and is rotting.

A door hood protects visitors from rain and may be found at 20th century buildings.

A "basket" or "box" balcony may be found on upper floors of pre-1835 buildings.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR BALCONIES, GALLERIES, PORCHES & OVERHANGS

The VCC requires the submission of dimensioned drawings for review of all components and details of a proposed balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang and VCC approval prior to installation or modification.

Reconstruction of a Balcony, Gallery, Porch or Roof Overhang

For the reconstruction of a previously existing balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang at a primary elevation, the VCC requires documentation of the missing element, such as a photograph, as well as detailed drawings of the proposed replacement, to confirm it will match the historic condition.

New Balcony, Gallery, Porch or Roof Overhang

Refer to *Guidelines for New Construction, Additions & Demolition* for information regarding the installation of a new balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang.

Appropriate Materials

- A residential wood-framed building typically has a wood balcony, gallery, porch or stoop, while a wood-framed commercial building may have a metal gallery or balcony
- A masonry building typically has a metal gallery or balcony and a stone, brick or concrete stoop

Salvaged Components

To find the best quality replacement woodwork or ornamental metal, a good place to start might be a local architectural salvage store. Due to the quality of the wood used in New Orleans' historic buildings, salvaged and repaired woodwork will often outlast new replacement woodwork. Whether installing a wood, metal or masonry component, take care with a salvaged material to match the size, shape, type, profile and detailing of an existing historic component. Just because it is old does not mean it is appropriate.

Accessibility

Refer to *Accessibility, Guidelines for Storefronts*, page 13-8, for information regarding the installation of an accessible ramp, lift and/or hardware.

Fire Escapes

Although fire escapes remain on some Vieux Carré buildings, they no longer meet building code requirements as a safe means of egress in the event of an emergency. The VCC recommends maintenance of an existing fire escape or its removal if alternate egress is provided. Mounting a new fire escape to a building or modifying an existing balcony or gallery for a fire escape is not permitted.

Lease of Air Rights

The City of New Orleans requires a lease of air rights for an encroachment such as a stair, ramp, gallery, balcony or roof overhang, that projects into or over a public sidewalk or right-of-way. Contact the Department of Property Management, Office of Real Estate and Records (504) 658-3615 for additional information.

Zoning Requirements

All proposed construction, including a gallery or a porch that expands a building footprint or covers a site, such as paving or a projection like a roof overhang, must meet the requirements of the Zoning Code for allowable buildable area and impervious surface coverage.

Building Code Requirements

Although select deteriorated components of a balcony, gallery or a porch may be replaced in kind, significant replacement or new construction must meet the requirements of current building codes. Areas typically affected are the heights of the railings and balustrades, as well as stair tread and riser dimensions. Contact the Office of Safety and Permits or the VCC for additional information.

BALCONY, GALLERY, PORCH & OVERHANG GUIDE

THE VCC REQUIRES:

- Replacing only the parts or components which cannot be repaired – such as repairing a column base, rather than replacing the entire column in-kind
- Matching the material, dimensions, size, profile, details and other visual characteristics of the historic component when replacement is necessary

THE VCC ALLOWS:

- Reconstructing a removed balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang that is compatible in size and scale to the building and streetscape on which it is being proposed with appropriate documentation

THE VCC DOES NOT ALLOW:

- Adding a new balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang on a building at a street elevation where it did not exist previously or where it is historically inappropriate, such as on a warehouse building
- Adding a new balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang that destroys or conceals an important architectural feature or detail of a building
- Replacing wood tongue and groove porch flooring with an alternate material or pattern
- Replacing wood steps with concrete or brick
- Replacing a wood railing and/or post with an iron or a synthetic material without historic documentation
- Adding a contemporary deck above the ground (Refer to *Rooftop Additions, Guidelines for New Construction, Additions & Demolition*, page 14-16)

IF CONSIDERING A NEW BALCONY, GALLERY, PORCH OR OVERHANG, THE VCC RECOMMENDS:

- Designing the new element to be compatible with the building's type and style including proportion and detailing of all elements (Refer to the *Guidelines for Building Types & Architectural Styles*)
- Aligning a new step with the front entrance
- Aligning the height of a new balcony, gallery, porch or roof overhang within a few inches of interior floor and ceiling heights
- Installing a 2'-0" to 3'-0" high stucco chain wall with vents to support the front elevation of a raised gallery or porch and installing piers at the side elevations
- Incorporating lighting and security installation into the design, if required (Refer to *Guidelines for Lighting & Security Cameras*)

ALTERNATE MATERIALS

In locations highly susceptible to rot, such as a column base, or where the duplication of a material will be prohibitively expensive, such as cast iron, the VCC will consider the use of an alternate material. To be approved, the proposed replacement material must match the appearance, size, profile, texture and finish of the historic material being replaced. When considering the use of an alternate material, the VCC considers the property's significance; the potential effect of the proposed material on the existing building fabric; the visibility; as well as the visual appearance and performance characteristics at the time of installation and over time.

ENCLOSING A BALCONY, GALLERY OR PORCH: NOT ALLOWED

Balconies, galleries and porches are meant to be open, exterior spaces including those that access a service wing or provide access to an adjacent room. These transitional spaces are an essential element of a building's type. As a result, enclosing these spaces is a radical alteration to a building and its visual perception. **The VCC does not allow the enclosure of any balcony, gallery or porch.** (Refer to *Balcony & Gallery Privacy Screening,* page 10-3.)

Balcony, Gallery, Porch, Overhang & Stoop Review	
Dimensioned drawings of all proposed components, including millwork or shop drawings of all details, must be submitted and approved by the VCC prior to any installation or modification	
Maintain, replace or install appropriate wood element or ornamental metal in-kind to match existing	**1** **2** **3** Staff
Remove, install or replace exterior wood trim or ornament with non-wood material; Replace ornamental metal with non-metal material	**1** Commission **2** **3** Architectural Committee
Install inappropriate component or material; Construct a new porch, gallery, balcony or overhang; Enclose a balcony, gallery or porch	**1** **2** Commission **3** Architectural Committee
Install an appropriate upper level ceiling fan or awning	**1** **2** **3** Staff
Install an inappropriate upper level ceiling fan or awning	**1** **2** **3** Architectural Committee

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www.nola.gov/vcc

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